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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
25 July 1966

ARMY review(s) completed.

State Dept. review completed

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001000010058-1

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HIGHLIGHTS

Confirmation of the entire North Vietnamese 324th "B" Division--numbering some 5,000 men--in Quang Tri Province South Vietnam has raised the number of infiltrators who have entered South Vietnam this year to about 32,500 men. This division is the first North Vietnamese unit to have infiltrated across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and may reflect North Vietnam's intention to use the DMZ as an avenue for future infiltration.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Operation HASTINGS/LAM SON 289 continues with light contact reported (Paras. 1-3). Korean marines participating in joint US-ROK Operation JOHN PAUL JONES report two minor engagements with the enemy now estimated to total 4,700 in the area of operations (Para. 4). A South Vietnamese company suffers moderate losses when attacked by a Viet Cong force ten miles south of Saigon (Para. 5). Operation CEDAR RAPIDS II ends in Binh Duong Province (Para. 6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
"Struggle" force elements still at large in central Vietnam apparently are continuing their antigovernment efforts (Paras. 1-2). Thich Thien Hoa, generally known as a nonpolitical religious leader, reportedly has been selected as acting chairman of the Buddhist Institute (Para. 3).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
The confirmation of the entire North Vietnamese 324th "B" Division has raised the number of infiltrators in 1966 to 32,500. This division is the first PAVN unit to infiltrate across the DMZ (Paras. 1-3).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: One of the most candid Communist assessments of the military situation in South Vietnam, appearing in a lengthy article in the North Vietnamese Army journal in mid-June, is discussed in some detail (Paras. 1-4).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Cambodian border troops apparently clashed with a Viet Cong force of 1,000 men on 17 July (Paras. 1-2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Operation HASTINGS/LAM SON 289 continues in northernmost Quang Tri Province with scattered skirmishes reported. Allied casualties now total 120 killed (99 US) and 474 wounded (448 US). US body count indicates 698 Communists have been killed since the heavy fighting began ten days ago.

2. Large amounts of enemy equipment have been captured by allied forces participating in this operation. A South Vietnamese force seized 400 rounds of 82-mm. mortar ammunition, 100 B-40 rockets, 200 grenades, 5,000 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition, and other small-arms ammunition and a number of uniforms following contact with an enemy force yesterday. Yesterday afternoon, US Marines overran what was probably the command post of the 324 "B" North Vietnamese Army Division headquarters and took about 40 pounds of documents.

3. Communist forces are reportedly using deceptive tactics to gain freedom of movement in the area of Operation HASTINGS. On 24 July, a US Marine company was approached by a North Vietnamese Army soldier wearing camouflaged fatigues and a US helmet. He was able to approach close to the unit unrecognized before he opened fire and fled. On 25 July a Communist soldier's body dressed in the same manner was found by the same marine unit.

4. South Korean Marines, participating in joint US-ROK Operation JOHN PAUL JONES in coastal Phu Yen Province, reported they had killed ten Communist troops and captured one in two separate small unit actions near Tuy Hoa last night. There were no Korean casualties. Revised intelligence estimates establish enemy strength in the area of this operation at 4,700. This figure includes two North Vietnamese Army regiments--the 95th and the 18"B"--totaling 4,000 troops.

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5. A company of South Vietnamese Army troops engaged an estimated company-size Viet Cong force about ten miles south of Saigon in Long An Province yesterday. Reinforcements were helilifted into the area, and armed helicopters and tactical air strikes supported the friendly forces. Sporadic contact continued throughout the night and ended early this morning. Friendly losses totaled 24 killed (one US), 23 wounded, and four missing. Two Viet Cong were killed and five captured.

6. Operation CEDAR RAPIDS II, a search-and-destroy operation conducted along Route 1A in Binh Duong Province about 25 miles north of Saigon, ended yesterday. Final results of the four-day operation include four Americans killed and 17 wounded with a total of 11 Viet Cong killed and 15 weapons captured.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

"Struggle Force" Remnants in Central Vietnam

1. A few remaining "struggle" force leaders still at large in central Vietnam have apparently banded together in an organization known as the "Hung Viet" Party. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] this group is based in Hue and is pro - Viet Cong in addition to being pro-"struggle." It apparently has printed some leaflets and banners, and has a membership of 15 or 20 persons, although these figures may include only its executive board. While the "Hung Viet" name has been used loosely to designate all remaining "struggle" elements still active, there is one other group known as the "Ky Cong," apparently made up largely of military deserters and reportedly located outside Hue.

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2. American officials in Hue have reported that there is not too much concern over these groups, and that it is probably too soon for "struggle" elements to reorganize and mount any meaningful effort. The US officials warned, however, that there did seem to be some tendency among local authorities to dismiss the effectiveness of these organizations, perhaps to demonstrate to higher Vietnamese authorities the effectiveness of the clean-up job already done.

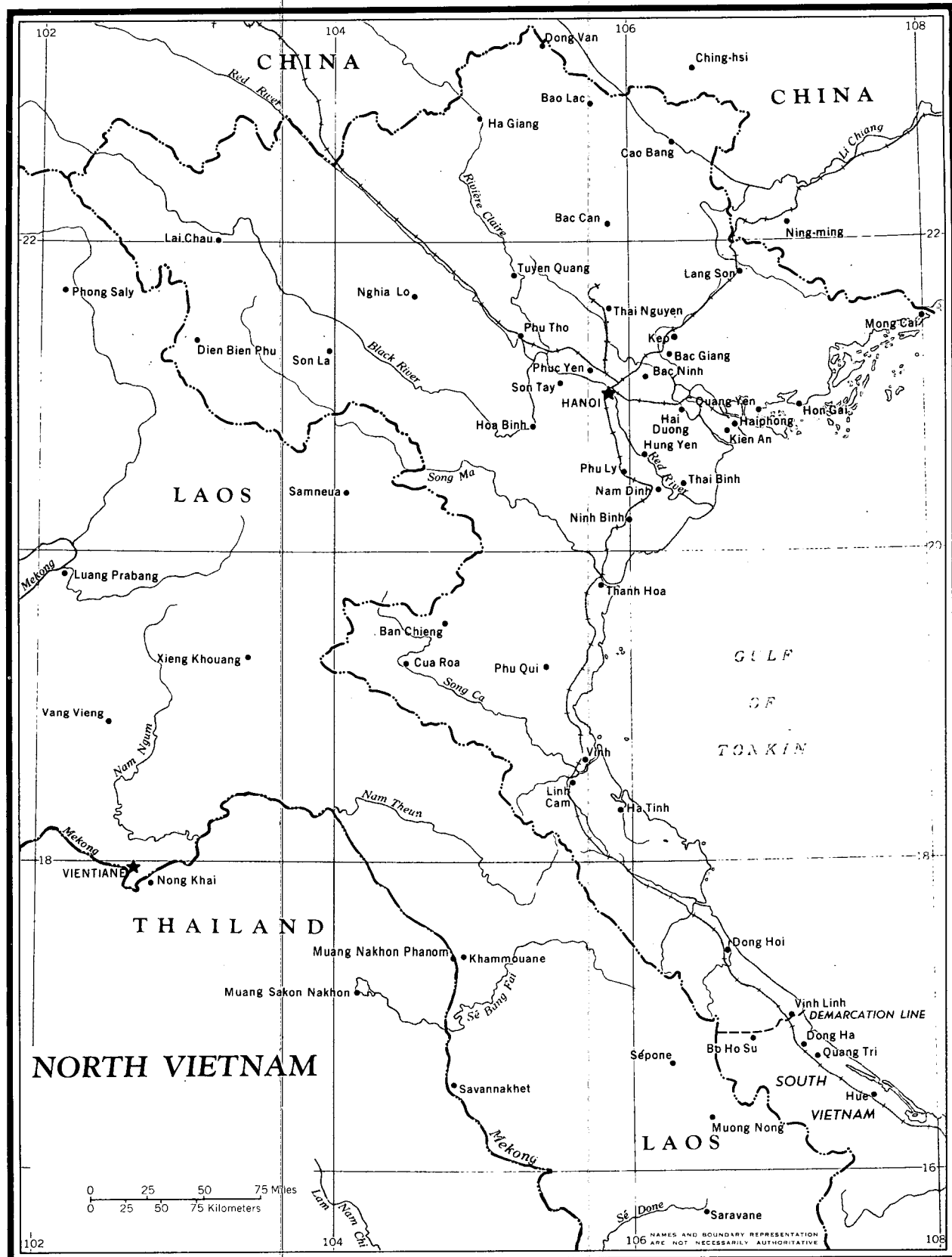
Acting Chairman of Buddhist Institute Reportedly Selected

3. According to a semiofficial Vietnamese press release, Thich Thien Hoa on 23 July was named acting chairman of the Buddhist Institute following several meetings of the Institute council and the superior Buddhist Council. Thien Hoa, who has been characterized generally as a nonpolitical religious leader, will replace chairman Tam Chau for some two months. The press release also stated that the date for an extraordinary meeting of a national Buddhist congress would be selected at a meeting of the Institute council tomorrow.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. MACV's confirmation of the entire North Vietnamese 324th "B" Infantry Division--numbering some 5,000 men--in Quang Tri Province of South Vietnam has raised the number of infiltrators who have entered South Vietnam this year to about 32,500 men. Reports of other infiltrating North Vietnamese units will raise this figure considerably higher in the coming months.

2. The 324th "B" Division is the first North Vietnamese unit to have infiltrated across the Demilitarized Zone into South Vietnam's northernmost province. All three regiments of the 324th infiltrated within a few weeks of each other, the shortest period of time that a unit of this size has taken to enter South Vietnam.

3. It is possible that North Vietnam intends to use the Demilitarized Zone, a route which has many advantages in both security and ease of infiltration, as an avenue for future infiltration. Recent photography of the area just north of the DMZ has revealed that some initial road construction activity may be taking place there possibly in an effort to facilitate such infiltration in much the same way that the step up in road construction in the Laos panhandle over the past year has increased infiltration through that region.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. One of the most candid Communist assessments of the military situation in South Vietnam appeared in a lengthy article in the North Vietnamese Army journal in mid-June. Shorn of its bombast the article suggests that the Vietnamese Communist leadership has a more sober view of the military situation in South Vietnam than it had in mid-1965 before the introduction of large numbers of US troops. It accurately described the Communist strategy in 1965 of launching attacks in the Kontum - Pleiku - Phu Bon area of the central highlands almost simultaneously with large operations nearer the central coast in Quang Ngai Province, and with large attacks farther south in the provinces just north of Saigon. The military objective of these coordinated attacks was to spread the ARVN so thin that its effectiveness as a fighting force would be threatened.

2. The article indicated that this year's goals would be aimed primarily at "eliminating" US troops. In place of the usual propaganda about the ineffectiveness of the US soldier, the article admitted that the Americans had both superior numbers and endless quantities of sophisticated and effective equipment. In discussing the US ability to mass large forces, for example, the article grudgingly expressed admiration of US tactical operations, insisting, however, that the "Liberation Forces" could still defeat them. The article contained a rare admission that US search-and-destroy operations might threaten Communist base camp areas, but denied that even this could "shake our iron-willed determination".

3. The text also covered specific military concepts which appeared to constitute advice from the High Command on how to battle the US in South Vietnam during the rest of 1966. He referred to the creation of what he called a "US extermination belt" around Da Nang, for example. This may reflect VC intent to restrict US forces in Da Nang and other US base complexes to the general area of these bases, allowing them only occasional forays into Communist-held territory.

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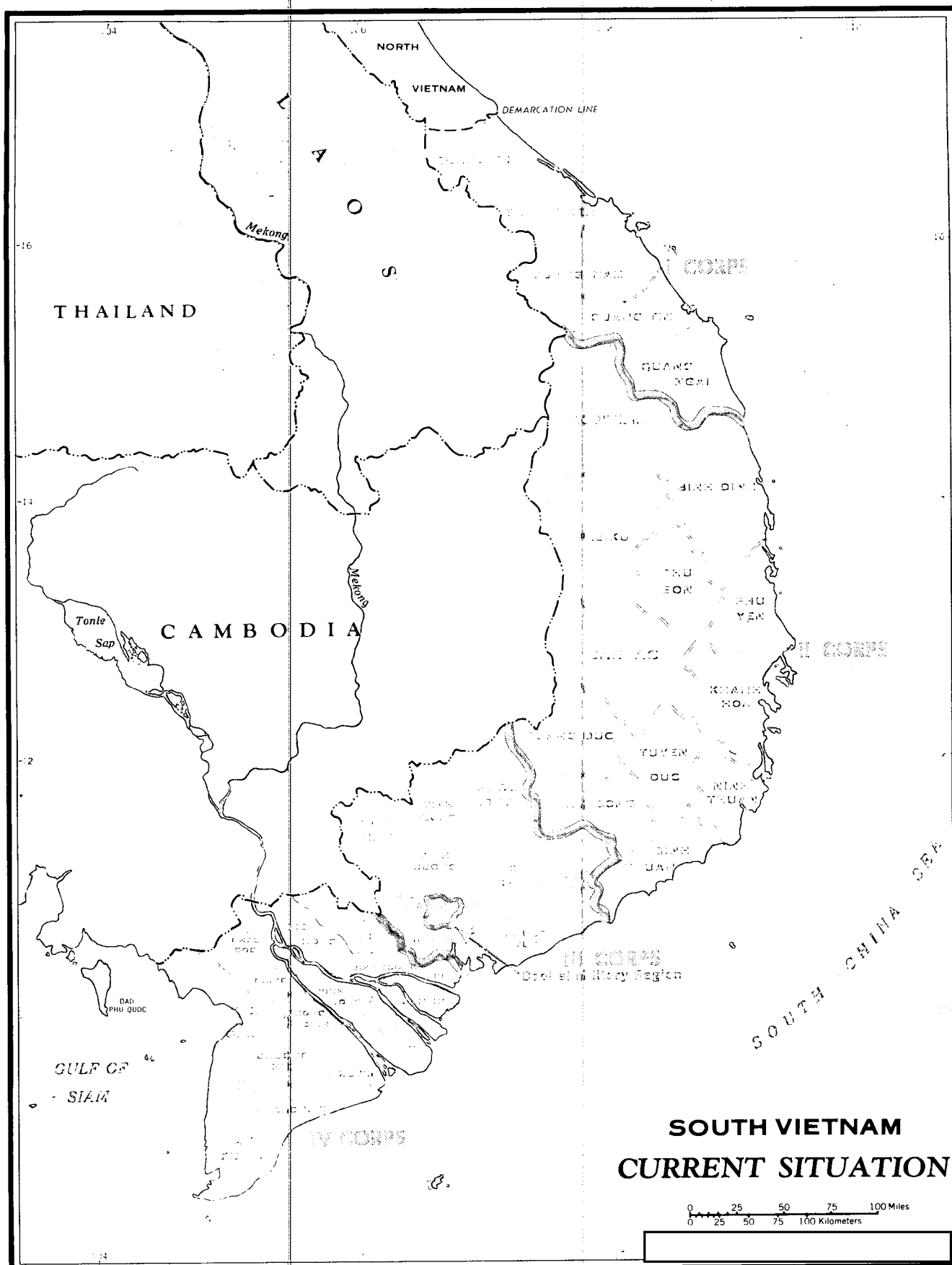
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4. The author was identified only as Truong Son (a pseudonym) and the article is described as having been sent out of South Vietnam. The author's grasp of the over-all military situation plus the authoritative tone of the pronouncements strongly suggest that it was written by a high-level Communist military personality and the article could represent the work of a North Vietnamese general actively directing Viet Cong military strategy in the South. Former political commissar of the Viet Minh, Nguyen Chi Thanh, has been absent from North Vietnamese political affairs for more than a year and a half, and has repeatedly been reported in South Vietnam.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Cambodian border troops apparently have clashed with a sizable Viet Cong force on Cambodian territory.

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2. Skirmishes between Cambodian border forces and Viet Cong intruders have been noted on numerous occasions in recent years, although not on this large a scale. These incidents, which are not publicized in Phnom Penh, indicate that in at least some areas along the 600-mile Cambodian - South Vietnamese border the Viet Cong have failed to work out arrangements with local Cambodians permitting their unmolested use of Cambodian territory. It also strongly suggests that there is no standing order from Phnom Penh directing Cambodian units to acquiesce in Viet Cong presence on Cambodian territory.

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